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ABSTRACT

This paper examines educational research today, its status, and its contribution to the policy-making process in the United Kingdom. It argues that educational research and policy making is in crisis; centrally funded research is subject to increasing intervention and restrictions on reporting; research findings are misreported in the press; and the policy-making process has become truncated by ignoring discussion, debate, and research evidence. In addition, the direction of current reforms is contrary to the style of curriculum, learning, and assessment that research has shown as necessary to produce resourceful, active learners for the 21st century. Recommendations are made to restate the goals shared by educators and the means to achieve those goals; develop researcher-teacher networks; battle against restrictive contracts (in particular, the limitations on publication); describe future "dystopias"; and reintroduce the concept of equity into the debate. The importance of academic critique, intellectual activity, and collegial work within the polity is even greater in this policy climate that is hostile to research in general and education in particular. (LMI)

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The Role of Educational Research in Policy Making in the UK

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The Role of Educational Research in Policy Making*

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Educational research in the UK is carried out largely in University Departments of Education, and three research institutions: the National Foundation for Educational Research (in England and Wales) the Scottish Council for Research in Education and the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Research. Work is funded by central government agencies (whose contracts have increasingly restrictive publication clauses) including the Department for Education (DFE) the National Curriculum Council (NCC) and the Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC); by funding bodies such as the Economic and Social Research Council, the Health Education Council; by charitable bodies and indirectly by Universities themselves since academic staff are in theory supposed to spend one third of their time on research. With the pressure on Universities our ability to spend anything like this amount of time on research is dwindling. There are plans under consideration to move towards a separation of research and teaching in Universities with different conditions of employment for staff in the two branches. This development is greeted with very mixed feelings among the academic community.

However, I am today talking about educational research at the current time, its status and its contribution to the policy-making process. I shall argue that educational research and policy making is in crisis: centrally funded research is subject to increasing intervention and restrictions on reporting; research findings are mis-reported in the press; the policy-making process has become truncated ignoring discussion, debate and research evidence. Furthermore the direction in which current reforms are taking education is contrary to the style of curriculum, learning and assessment that research has shown us is needed to produce resourceful, active learners for the twenty-first century.

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* An earlier version of this paper was given as the Presidential Address to the BERA Conference, Stirling August 1992.

We have had, under the Conservative Government, over six years of hostile policy climate for research in general and education in particular. Since the election, a year ago, the climate has hardened further. Whilst a certainty that times might be hard was in the air in 1988 when the Education Reform Act was published what we did not anticipate was that policy making, based on research evidence and informed discussion, would virtually disappear. Research and evaluation is still being funded by central agencies but the work is subject to delay in reporting, (or not being reported at all), mis-reporting in the popular press and a general discourse of derision (Ball, 1990) which has, effectively I fear, asserted the primacy of common-sense knowledge over specialist, expert knowledge and assigned it (forever?) to the sidelines. It may be of course that common-sense knowledge will, through its impact on educational policy making, result in a 'better' education system in the sense that it is more efficient. But I believe that the system which is emerging will not be more fair, that it will not offer equity along with excellence, nor will it produce the kind of active, resourceful skills-based learner which we in the UK need for the next century. Be that as it may, and I will come back to both these points later, the situation in one of crisis for those of us who work in educational research and make us question whether we should continue with our work.

It is not simply that the research is no good: even research which is internationally renowned on, for example, school effectiveness, assessment, science education, is ignored in the policy making process.

First, I will give some examples to support my claim that educational research and policy making is in crisis, then attempt an analysis of how we got where we are. I shall explain why I think current reforms are not likely to produce the sort of learner we need for the twenty first century, before turning to what I think we need to do in the future.

Examples of the Crisis in Educational Research and Policy Making

In summer 1991 seven year olds took the Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs), performance assessments given as part of the national assessment program, for the first time. The reporting and publicity over those results gave rise to two of

the most shameful and unsavoury events in recent years. First, Kenneth Clarke the then Secretary of State for Education announced in an article published in a Sunday tabloid, four days before the results were officially available, that the figures would show that nearly a third of seven-year olds were unable to recognise three letters of the alphabet (Mail on Sunday, December 1991). This information was then repeated on the BBC's "The World This Weekend" radio programme and in many other media slots. In fact, the figures showed that 2.5% of the seven year olds tested were at this level of competence. Mr Clarke's 28% of seven year olds were actually those who had not reach Level Two in reading which involves reading 100 words of text with accuracy and comprehension - whereas his comments implied that they had not reach Level One. Whether witting or unwitting this error set up in the public's mind that something was terribly amiss in, not only the teaching of reading, but primary education in general. As we know, no amount of retraction or apology could make the same impact as the initial claims and indeed there was none. The National Association of Teachers of English eventually received a written apology from Marmaduke Hussey, BBC Chairman, who said that it was too late to offer a correction (TES 24/4/92 BBC apologies for reading story error) and suggested they write a letter to Feedback - the Radio 4 programme which deals with complaints. . .

Next, the results for seven year olds were put into LEA (school district) league tables (DES 1991) and published, despite schools and LEAs having been informed that, since it was technically a trial run, no such thing would happen and despite evidence from an independent evaluation commissioned at Leeds University by SEAC that the national assessment data was undependable. The draft of the Leeds report was received at SEAC on December 9th two weeks before the LEA league tables were published. That the report had not yet been approved by SEAC and that it had not been passed on to the minister is not really in doubt, but one would expect, in a system which was concerned with efficiency and interested in facts and accuracy for such information - even in draft status - to be acted on to halt the league tables. Publication went ahead and the LEAs at the bottom of the league table were pilloried while Clarke went on to blame poor teaching and Labour -led councils' high spending and inefficiency (Guardian 7/4/92 Heat on Thatcher Aide Tests furore). In fact the Leeds draft report (the final version of which was published in the last week of July 1992) stating that the results were unreliable had added "In a context where the results of

assessment may be made public, schools with large numbers of ethnic minority children, children from deprived social backgrounds or even younger rather than older children, would not appear in a particularly good light. The reasons for this would under these circumstances have little to do with the quality and appropriateness of the education being offered". Was ignoring the early findings of this research study gross incompetence on behalf of Mr Clarke's professional advisers, or political handling of unpalatable evidence? Which ever it was, the delay over publication meant that the information about unreliability came too late for the LEAs at the bottom of the league tale and had a profound effect on public opinion.

As an example of the discourse of derision we have Education Ministers Eggar and Fallon attacking the seminal work of Harvey Goldstein and Desmond Nuttall on the analysis of school performance data. Eggar said "we must not cover up under achievement with fiddled figures" (ref TES 22/11/91 'Fiddled' figures scorned). Kenneth Clarke referred to them as "Nutstein and Goldall" 'pretending' he had never heard of them or their work; Fallon said "we will not be dressing up the facts, obscuring the real level of performance by altering outcomes to take account of spurious measures of disadvantage or deprivation". It took the Headmistress of Cheltenham Ladies College to retort that this was an "arrogant and ignorant" response (Evening Standard 6/11/91 Fallon snubs professors' exam plea). The independent sector of course knows only too well that there is a very high correlation between the level of academic selectivity of a school and its academic success. As the Head of probably the most academically selective boys' public school, Westminster, commented on a league table of independent schools "I wonder if you realise what a disservice you do to so many schools by concocting a league table of this kind?" (Daily Telegraph, 5/9/91 More schools aspire to the top table). In fact, due perhaps to the outcry from the independent schools, the Government is now considering some form of 'value-added' measure in the league tables.

For developments in policy that actually ignore educational evidence one must cite the reduction in coursework in GCSE. Coursework assessment reduces the weight and emphasis given to the terminal examination in our 16+ public examination. Despite early problems over organisation and timing, it is clear to many parents, teachers and HMI, that (HMI, 1988) coursework encourages pupils

to keep working through the year, and requires coverage of a wider part of the syllabus rather than 'topic-spotting' for an exam. It enables pupils to be assessed on a wider range of tasks than traditional exams, and allows a broader range of candidates the opportunity to show what they can do, unlike the traditional hurdle exam. What's more, the traditional pencil and paper exam cannot test the whole of the National Curriculum. Now, however, the extent of the course-work assessed element has been reduced to 20-30% of the final grade.

The public exams taken after the GCSE, A and AS levels, and modular courses are to follow the same pattern with reduced coursework and a terminal exam (yes, even for modular courses) which will effectively reduce the advantages of modular study (TES 20/12/91 p.9) and limit the possibility of A and AS levels being brought closer to vocational courses. This move even flies in the face of the employers, given the recommendation of the Confederation of British Industry in their report 'Towards a Skills Revolution' for more varied teaching and assessing methods in all post-16 courses. (TES 10/1/92 A-level limits will hamper reform).

If any further example were needed that we have lost our way it is the apparent disregard for the group of children who are difficult to education, or who come to school with few advantages. In the world of delegated budgets, selection and league tables such children, particularly those with special needs, are fairly unmarketable commodities. As the Director of the National Children's Bureau put it: current policies "appeal to the constituency of achieving parents, essentially a group quite capable of looking after themselves" (TES 17/1/92 Needy child must not be abandoned). Those of use who warned about the social implications of the Education Reform Act (Gipps, 1990) with its combination of published national assessment results, and emphasis on competition (which would effectively overwhelm the advantages of a common entitlement curriculum) were castigated as overly-negative and harbingers of doom. It gives little pleasure to see item by item that we are being proved right. From the rise in the number of exclusions to the increase in children going to <u>separate</u> special needs provision to the documenting of the empty rhetoric of parental choice for all.

A fair competition after all is one in which the best person wins (not one in which everyone has the chance to gain something) and free choice for some is the loss of choice for others.

As Stephen Ball (Ball 1992) has documented, the concept of market choice allows the articulate middle and educated classes to exert their privilege (whilst not appearing to). Both the market and the chooser operate in terms of self-interest and the result is exclusion and differentiation, rather than freedom and choice. Choice is not to be confused with selection. How the system copes with unchosen schools and unselected children is likely to be a major dilemma. Chubb and Moe, who were invited to analyse the British system, write this dilemma off in two paragraphs, which completely underestimates the task:

> "The standard criticisms of choice are aimed at the free market. They argue that people are not well enough informed to make good choices, that people lack transportation to the schools they prefer, that schools will discriminate in admissions, that private schools will prosper at the expense of state schools, and so on. And because these problems primarily affect the poor and minorities, they say, a choice system would push these people into second-class schools, while the economically advantaged would behave like bandits.
>
> Choice is not a free market system. Its "educational markets" operate within an institutional framework, and the government's job is to design the framework so that the concerns are dealt with". (Sunday Times magazine 9/2/92 The Classroom Revolution).

We have of course heard very little of this 'frame-work' and one reason is that equity is not really on the agenda.

How did we get where we are?

This shift in policy making, away from one based on discussion and evidence , is not only happening in education. As Jonathan Rosenhead, Professor of Operational Research at the London School of Economics, points out (Guardian 5/5/92 Platform: Politics of the gut reaction) the demise of the Central Policy

Review staff - the original Think Tank - set up by Prime Minister Heath, and its eventual replacement by the Policy Unit, the Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute marked a shift from policy choice based on evidence and argument to one based on principles and gut reaction. Rosenhead describes what he calls the impoverished policy process in which the Think Tanks promote policy through strong value assertions and then proceed directly to detailed prescriptions. Argumentation is intuitive: there is appeal at most to anecdotal evidence but not to research. As examples of the result of this abbreviated policy process with slip shod or absent analysis he cites: the health care reforms, the poll tax, school opting out and the student loans 'fiasco'. Rosenhead places at the root of this movement an ideology with a semi-mystical belief in the beneficial properties of market forces and a disbelief in the power of reason; this has resulted, he concludes, in a 'wilful failure to concede a significant role to reason in the practice of collective decision making'.

The power of the Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute are widely recognised, but not universally welcomed even among Tories. Sir Malcolm Thornton, Conservative MP, Chairman of the Commons Select Committee on Education and a long time worker for public education has very recently condemned the extreme Right Wing pressure groups as `Lords of Misrule':

> "I believe that both the wider debate and the ears of Ministers have been disproportionately influenced by extremists - extremists whose pronouncements become ever wider and further from the reality of the world of education which I recognise, in which I work and for which I care deeply.
>
> And who are they to foist upon the children of this country ideas which will only serve to take them backwards? What hard evidence do they have to support their assertions? How often do they actually go into schools and see for themselves what is really happening? What possible authority can they claim for representing the views of 'the overwhelming majority of parents'? I believe that in all their answers to these - and many more - questions, they are found wanting.

Their insidious propaganda must be challenged. They seek to return to a world which, if it ever existed, cannot be recreated today. To do so would mean disinventing television and information technology; disregarding the massive social changes which have taken place, and so many other things which have not just changed society at large but also have had an enormous impact on our education system." (Thornton, 1993 p.173).

The ex-Senior Chief Inspector of Schools, Eric Bolton, who with his colleagues helped to promote and monitor the implementation of the National Curriculum, has also joined the general criticism by pointing out that the Government . . .

" . . . . listens so selectively that most of those in the education service fear what they have to say falls on deaf ears. The Government does not seem to listen to :

1. Heads and teachers; teacher associations; governors and education researchers, on the difficult issues of school effectiveness, value-added and league tables. It *does* listen to John Marks and the Adam Smith Institute.

2. Heads of schools; governing bodies; head teacher associations; vice-chancellors and teacher trainers, when it sets out to reform teacher training. It *does* listen to Sheila Lawlor whose critique of Initial Teacher Training is based on a somewhat selective reading of course prospectuses and is not complicated by ever having visited and systematically observed what goes on.

3. Public examination boards; chief examiners; most heads and teachers; HMI and large employers, when it sets out to squeeze the GCSE back into a GCE 'O' level mould. It *does* listen to the Centre for Policy Studies and a small group of independent schools heads.

4. HMI; heads of effective primary schools, and non-ideologically driven experts, on the teaching of reading. It *does* listen to Martin Turner who initially claimed, on somewhat elusive evidence, that reading standards in England were falling across the board (not

true) and that *the cause* was that primary schools had rushed, or been led, wholesale into modern, trendy teaching of reading based on the 'Real Books' approach (again, not true).

There is no crime in listening to your political friends. But a wise government listens more widely than that, and especially to those with no political axe to grind. It is not auspicious that the formal channels of advice about education to the Government appear to be either muzzled (e.g., HMI), or packed with people likely to say whatever the Government wants to hear (i.e., the NCC and SEAC)." (Bolton, 1993 p.15)

I would argue that in the suppression of unwelcome research reports, the rubbishing of academics' arguments, and the marginalisation of unproductive pupils and schools we see an erosion of democracy (Sampson, 1992), and furthermore will see an increase of the underclass by virtue of the type of education system we are developing. [Do not assume by this that I wish incompetent schools to be left as they are - far from it, but a collegial system which supports, manages and improves would be far preferable to one based on market forces - however they might operate here].

The status of educational research is, perhaps inevitably, a mirror of the status of education and teaching - at all levels - itself.

As Smithers and Robinson (1991) reported "Poor discipline, heavy workloads and lack of status are pushing teachers out of state schools and into the independent sector or out of education altogether . . . " (TES 27/12/91 Lack of status fuels the exodus). Of those leaving the profession the highest proportion (1/5) did so through early retirement or ill-health; typically ex-teachers became insurance-sellers, tour operators, taxi drivers or opened guest houses - almost half of those leaving the profession became self-employed; more than half of those who decided to change jobs altogether said it was the feeling of being undervalued that prompted the decision. To those outside schools the teacher supply 'problem' seems to have gone away because recruitment to ITT is buoyant. This is, however, seen within education to be due to the recession, rather than any sudden improvement in the status of teaching. As Professor Smithers put it

"Government has solved the teacher supply crisis by closing down the economy". (TES 27/12/91 Quotes of the Year).

A.H. Halsey in his (third) survey of academic staff in Universities and Polytechnics has documented the Decline of Donnish Dominion (Halsey 1992). During the last 30 years higher education has expanded on an enormous scale. One might have thought that with the growing demands for its services the status of the academic profession would have risen, instead public esteem for academics is lower than ever. Our prestige has plummeted in the eyes of the "politician and the populace": deteriorating conditions of intellectual work, declining autonomy of institutions, fallen salaries, decreased chances of promotion, loss of tenure - these are the tangible aspects of the loss of status and esteem. Few of Halsey's respondents now recommend to their students a life in higher education.

As Professor Paul Black, (who chaired the Task group which designed the national assessment programme, and who is in much demand in the U.S. as a consultant on performance assessment) put it . . .

> " . . . the so-called educational establishment has been elevated to the status of bogeyman, and the terms 'expert', 'academic' and 'researcher' have been turned into terms of abuse. As an expert academic researcher who saw the Act as a force for good, and who has given much of his time to trying to help its development, I am deeply disappointed and fearful at the outcomes . . . " (Black, 1993 p.59).

The Direction of Educational Reform

Being ignored or derided might be acceptable if education were going in a positive direction, but since it is not, we are perhaps more justified in feeling despair.

The direction in which education and educational reform is moving is putting us firmly into a pedagogical and curriculum model which will not produce the sort of individual which our country needs for the next century. Current directions in central policy making in education are at odds with the direction which research

on learning and cognition would tell us to take. The transmission model of teaching, in a traditional formal classroom, with strong subject and task boundaries and traditional narrow assessment is the opposite of what we need to produce learners who can think critically, synthesise and transform, experiment and create. We need a flexible curriculum, active co-operative forms of learning, opportunities for pupils to talk through the knowledge which they are incorporating, open forms of assessment e.g. self-evaluation and reflection on their learning, in short a thinking curriculum aimed at higher order performance and cognitive skills.

Instead we are heading, inexplicably, back to the grammar school curriculum (with the addition of computing and technology) in a system in which teachers, deprived of autonomy, will have little scope for offering learners autonomy in a high-stakes testing driven system. Teaching for understanding is, after all, not the same as teaching for the test.

The Right, particularly the Centre for Policy Studies, believes that the only appropriate form for high-status examinations is the one we have had in the past, (TES 10/1/92 Think Tank cuts back in coursework) in that Golden Age we all remember when education served us so well: the terminal unseen examination. The other problem seems to be that more pupils are gaining GCSEs than was the case in the old days of O level and CSE (this of course was one of the intentions of GCSE). This has been interpreted as meaning that standards must be falling and Mr Clarke's fear " . . . seems to be that people <u>who don't deserve</u> it are getting qualifications, staying on at school . . . " (TES 29/11/91 Comment; TES 10/1/92 A successful disaster). Or to put it more bluntly, the only examinations worth having are those that most people fail (Black op cit). As I have said, equity is not on the agenda! So we are moving back to a traditional examination model while you in the USA are striving to move away from highly standardised procedures and develop performance assessment. It is happening too with national assessment at ages 7, 11 and 14: the design is shifting away from performance assessments and teacher assessment to more traditional standardised procedures (Gipps, 1993).

Similarly, the more traditional model of classroom management in which the teacher manages the teaching (and learning) experience, in which students are to be obedient, compliant learners is in tension with our educational requirements for the next century: the self-motivated, active learner. Classroom management needs to do more than elicit predictable obedience: it should be a vehicle for the enhancement of self-understanding, self-evaluation and the internalisation of self-control and direction (McCaslin and Good, 1992). This requires allowing pupils to have growing responsibility for and self-regulation in their learning and to become adaptive learners rather than predictable learners.

The lack of concern with equity means that we will move once again to doing what we were always good at - educating an elite - while as Guthrie points out:

> "Reliance upon a narrow number (sic) of intellectual elite is increasingly outmoded. Modern manufacturing and service industry techniques demand an entire labour force capable of continually adjusting to new technologies and making informed decisions. Educated and highly skilled human intelligence is coming to be viewed as a nation's primary economic resource, and it is needed in large amounts". (Guthrie, 1991, p.310).

The Current Situation

As I write this, in February, it seems possible that things may be coming to a head. The level of hostility between Ministers and the profession has risen exponentially: the arrogance of the so-called policy-makers and their bad decisions has succeeded in antagonising the independent school sector and uniting them with their colleagues in the maintained sector. The independent school heads resent the Government's attitude to the teaching profession and their refusal to allow a General Teaching Council to be set up (Guardian Education 5/1/93 p.4 'Table talk in the private sector', Judith Goodland); the lack of spiritual and educational values in the new White Paper; the secrecy and lack of piloting in the age 14 national assessments (TES 1/1/93 p.11 'Will the canons to the right let up in 1993?'). The last straw is this section of the Government's White paper Diversity and Choice currently going through Parliament: "Parents know best the needs of their children - certainly better than educational theorists or administrators, better even than our mostly excellent teachers". (DFE 1992

para. 1.6). As the President of the Girls Schools Association (the prestigious girls independent schools group) said there is a denigration of professionalism in the White Paper "which disturbs us as much as teachers in the maintained sector". The suggestion that parents know best amounts to a denial of the partnership between teachers and parents on which the best practice has always been based. (TES 13/11/92 'A-level triumph for girls' schools' p.9).

When the National Association of Head Teachers and the Secondary Heads' Association issued a joint statement demanding a sharp reduction in the compulsory content of the curriculum for children aged 5-14 and the abolition of national testing in primary schools, it won the immediate backing of the Headmasters Conference (representing independent boys' schools) and the Girls Schools Association . Together these four associations represent virtually all the Headteachers in England and Wales (Daily Telegraph 13/11/92 'Heads united in attack on curriculum'). So far there has been no response to this from the Secretary of State. The Minister of State for Education, Baroness Blatch, described Bolton's criticisms as blatant nonsense, Paul Black as hopelessly out of touch and the GSA as relics of the sixties (that's an insult by the way).

When seven parents' organisations got together and criticised government reforms Patten described their protests as `Neanderthal' and could not find time to meet with them (The Times 28/1/93 'Parents' protests branded primitive').

So the Government now appears to be at odds with the research community, the teaching profession, both state and independent sectors, and parents. Where will it end?

Let me just add another snippet: apparently there are to be no studies of reliability carried out on behalf of SEAC for the national assessments at age 7 and 14. This means that there will be no evidence on reliability for the high-stakes tests which will be used to judge the performance of individual pupils, schools and school districts (Black, 1993, op cit). It is hard to believe is it not?

A Professional Agenda

Is there anything we can do in this situation, whether to improve it or survive it?

Yvonna Lincoln grappling in the US with a very similar situation in which the research evidence on the problems of a national assessment movement was being swept aside: "the data of the positivist research community is ignored, while the analyses of the criticalist community is treated as through it did not exist" argues that as social scientists we have always been poor at communicating with policy makers, that we have focused on the effects of policies rather than on the processes of policy development and that we must correct these trends and learn how to manage an impact on the policy process as well as learning how to address research consumers, including policy analysts. (Lincoln, 1992). But in this post-Rothschild era of research and policy making, we find that the gap between the values and expectations of the research community and the policy makers is widening. Government supported research is expected to articulate with the government's policy agenda: "it is more of a politically-steered, categorically-funded, problem-solving activity". (Hamilton, 1992).

I believe therefore that, first, we need to re-state what we as educationists have in common, and that is contingent on our view of what constitutes good education: an education which permits every individual to achieve the best they are capable of (not "educate the best, forget the rest"). As Dewey put it: "men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common . . . what they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge - a common understanding - . . . ". (Dewey, 1916 p.5). Furthermore we need to keep re-stating the means by which we believe this can best be achieved. We and the schools and teachers with whom we work are a polity, a community with shared purpose. We must through our work with BERA hang together: we need the Invisible College as a grand network and support to counteract the micropolitics of our everyday lives within our Institutions as well as the hostile policy climate outside them.

I have focused mainly on funded research in this address, partly because that is the form of research in which I am most closely involved, and partly because it is

this form of research on which policy is/should be based. Many BERA members are engaged in other forms of research including teacher research which is recognised throughout the world. The development of networks for and with teachers building professional communities which work together to improve practice, are a major contribution to the professional development of both sides of the partnership and a key to supporting a worthwhile educational enterprise. We must encourage and continue this work.

Of course I believe that we should still do funded research, but undertaking centrally-funded research at any cost (in terms of sponsor control over design and publication) devalues the profession of educational research. As individuals in beleaguered institutions and with colleagues' livelihoods at stake we may have little choice but to get involved in this type of work. But, as members of a professional association, we must continue to battle against restrictive contracts and in particular limitations on publication. The restrictions on publication, which amount to a denial of intellectual property rights, in many funded research contracts carried out by academics employed by Universities (Pettigrew and Norris, 1992) shocks our colleagues on this side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

Furthermore, we need to analyse policy and put into the public domain not only critiques but also to describe 'dystopias': the undesirable futures that are implicit in current policies and trends (Campbell 1981). At this stage, that may be more effective than describing utopias or alternative desirable futures. We spend much energy characterising the period that we are in or past (post-modern, post-structural, post-Fordist, post-positivist, post-Thatcher, post everything) but we often omit to consider the period that lies ahead. We know what we are post, but what are we pre? If education is becoming defined as a tool of industrial strategy what kind of society will result? What kind of utopia or dystopia are we then building? One in which I as an individual shall do my "duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me?" (Book of Common Prayer, Catechism) a profoundly non-Enlightenment project.

In the UK we need to reintroduce the concept of equity into the debate: if we do not, then who will speak for the constituency of the non-achieving parent, who will speak for the full and equal rights, the right not to be marginalised, of pupils

who have learning or behaviour difficulties? "Are we aiming for a minimalist morality in which you do good (or avoid doing harm) to others only if it is in your own interests?" (Tomlinson, 1992). Let us hope not.

If we do not describe the possible dystopias we shall be left only with the politicians' utopias. If we do not insist on bringing research findings (which may be politically inconvenient) into the public arena, we contribute to the erosion of democracy. The 'discourse of derision' which results must be seen as an inconvenient, even unpleasant, occupational hazard, but its power will be far greater if we allow it to silence us.

Perhaps we can, like Erickson, looking back to the golden age when qualitative researchers experienced academic marginality, believe that our position on the periphery will lead to fresh insights in substance and in method; that indeed at some point we will look back with nostalgia to this era of marginality when we became, once again, legitimate. "Maybe we can stay marginal as the cutting edge moves on, post-everything" (Erickson, 1992). If being marginal to policy making is a phase that we must continue to endure for at least another five years then we must use this period, not to stagnate or give up, but to think, to rethink, to develop, to understand the policy process, to support each other, and the schools and teachers with whom we work. The importance of academic critique and intellectual activity, of collegial work within the polity, is even greater in an era such as this.

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